

The Carson City Mint: High on the legends list

By Roger Boye

ALTHOUGH IT produced coins for only 21 years, the Carson City [Nev.] Mint has become something of a legend in U. S. coinage history.

The mint, which made coins from 1870 to 1885 and from 1889 to 1893, was established because it was close to rich gold and silver deposits, including the Comstock Lode. But during most of the years the mint was in operation, relatively few coins were produced there.

Consequently, coins carrying the "CC" mint mark are usually top collector items today, often selling for higher prices than coins of the same era produced in Philadelphia, San Francisco, or New Orleans.

The Carson City Mint encountered special problems when it opened and when it closed. The mint opened on Jan. 8, 1870, just days after an earthquake destroyed several buildings in Carson City. The solid brick building housing the mint withstood the quake.

However, much of the mint's equipment was not of such quality. For example, the coin presses were not powerful enough to make well-struck \$20 gold pieces. As a result, fine details are difficult to see on some Carson City-struck coins, even in uncirculated condition.

Because it never produced great numbers of coins, the government decided in 1893 to close

it as an economy move. The San Francisco Mint could produce coins for the Rocky Mountain states at less expense.

Before it was closed, an audit showed the Carson City Mint was short 3,000 ounces of gold bullion. After a lengthy investigation by the Secret Service, the mint's assistant melter, John T. Jones, and its silver dissolver, James H. Heney, were arrested, and later convicted, for stealing the gold. Each was sentenced in 1896 to eight years in prison.

Today, the building is a museum and features, among other items, coin presses. One of the presses was used last summer to produce medals for the Nevada Bicentennial Commission.

A bill in Congress would make those medals official national medals, since they were struck on the historic press. However, the bill is given little chance of passage.

Mrs. Mary Brooks, director of the United States Mint, has said the bill would establish "an undesirable precedent, since it would for the first time designate a medal which is designed and manufactured outside the control and supervision of the federal government as a national medal."

Passage of the bill could induce similar proposals which would "erode the special prestige now attached to national medals," she added.